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REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST*

Twentieth progress report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine

(14 October 1961 - 7 December 1962)

[Note by the Secretary-General: The twentieth progress report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine has been transmitted by the Chairman of the Commission to the Members of the United Nations, in accordance with paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 512 (VI) of 26 January 1952.]

Introduction

1. In the period since its last progress report, the Commission has been concentrating on the tasks assigned it by the Assembly in resolution 1725 (XVI) of 20 December 1961. The Assembly requested the Commission to intensify its efforts for the implementation of operative paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III), urged the Arab host Governments and Israel to co-operate with the Commission in this regard, and requested the Commission to intensify its work on the identification and evaluation of Arab refugee immovable properties in Palestine.

Identification and valuation programme

2. On 22 December 1961 the Commission considered the request of the General Assembly that it should intensify its work on the identification and evaluation of Arab refugee immovable properties in Palestine as at 15 May 1948, and to make every effort to complete that work by 1 September 1962.

3. In its nineteenth progress report ^{1/} the Commission, after explaining the valuation work in process, had stated: "There remains the task, now under consideration, of computing each owner's holdings, which involves calculating the respective shares... in the individual parcels and preparing an index of owners' names." The Commission, however, had postponed a decision on further stages of the work programme of its Technical Office until after the General Assembly at its sixteenth session had considered the report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

4. In the light of the Assembly's request, the Commission decided to supplement the existing programme calling for completion of the valuation work of individual parcels by the autumn of 1962 by authorizing the next logical stage of work, namely: the calculation of the value of each owner's share in jointly owned properties, the aggregation of the value of each owner's total immovable property holdings and the preparation of an index of owners' names. The Secretary-General undertook to provide the additional staff and administrative facilities required.

5. On 10 September 1962 the Commission received from its Technical Office a supplementary report which indicated completion of the valuation work of individual parcels within the limitations referred to in the Office's preliminary report described in paragraph 13 of the Commission's nineteenth progress report. The separate parcels of land which have been valued total 453,000 and the total value of these parcels represents the over-all values as at 29 November 1947 of all immovable property holdings in Israel owned by Arab individuals. From this figure there would have to be deducted the value of the immovable property of those Arabs who remained in Israel and other non-refugees.

6. The task of computing the value of each owner's holdings and the preparation of an index of owners' names was set back somewhat by delays in securing the necessary staff and facilities but particularly by unforeseen complexities in the work. With expansion of staff it is estimated that

this task could be completed by the eighteenth session of the General Assembly. Nevertheless, the Commission is of the opinion that the identification and valuation work has reached the point where the results can serve as the basis for initiation of any scheme of compensation which may be decided upon. It is further of the opinion that any compensation operation would be facilitated by completion of the current task of computing the owner's holdings and compiling an index of owners' names.

*Release of Arab refugee bank accounts blocked in Israel
and transfer of safe deposit and safe custody items*

7. In its nineteenth progress report the Commission stated that it expected that the final stage in the operations for the release of bank accounts of refugees and absentee owners would start in the near future. The final stage concerned a relatively small number of accounts totalling approximately £150,000 held by small banks in Israel which had a limited number of Arab clients. At the date of that report the remaining preliminary steps were to secure the concurrence to the plan of the fourth Government involved, the Syrian Arab Republic, and to make the final technical arrangements. On 7 May 1962 the Commission issued a press statement announcing that arrangements had been completed for the release to refugee and absentee owners of their accounts in banks other than Barclays Bank (Dominion, Colonial and Overseas (DCO)) and former branches of the Ottoman Bank. Account holders were invited to file application forms at designated banks in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the United Arab Republic and in Gaza. Because a certain number of Arab refugee account holders had not yet withdrawn, in accordance with previous release operations, the balance of their accounts in Israel branches of Barclays Bank (DCO) and in former branches of the Ottoman Bank, the same press statement invited such account holders to claim their balances. Advance copies of the statement were made available to Governments concerned with the request that their government press offices arrange for its immediate publication.

8. Announcements appeared in the local Press and the operation has proceeded in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Sixty applications have been received and are now being processed in accordance with standard procedures. No publication of the statement has taken place in the United Arab Republic or in Gaza.

9. During the first stage of the release operation in 1953 the Government of Israel had turned over for payment by the banks a total of £740,408. As at 31 July 1962 a total of £2,791,680 of the blocked accounts of refugees and absentee owners had been released since the 1954 release scheme was inaugurated. Thus, on 31 July 1962 a grand total of £3,532,088 had been paid to owners of blocked accounts.

10. The Commission's press statement also invited owners of unclaimed safe custody items, now resident in Jordan or Lebanon, to apply for their release at the indicated banks. As indicated in the Commission's nineteenth progress report, arrangements for the release of such items to owners resident in the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Republic had not been concluded at that time. The Commission hopes that its current efforts to solve this long-standing problem will be successful and make possible the completion of this operation in the interest of refugees now resident in the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Republic and Gaza.

11. As of 31 July 1962 the status of the release scheme for safe custody items and the contents of safe deposit lockers were as follows:

	Boxes and <u>parcels</u>	Shares, bonds, <u>etc.</u>	Palestine Government <u>bearer bonds</u>	Safe deposit <u>lockers</u>
Total	60	800	434	178
Released	<u>38</u>	<u>261</u>	<u>323</u>	<u>142</u>
Balance outstanding	22	539	111	36

Mission of the Special Representative

12. The most significant aspect of the Commission's work during the last year has been the continuation and intensification of the initiative carried on by its Special Representative, Mr. Joseph E. Johnson, conferring with the Government of Israel and the four Arab host Governments with a view to facilitating progress towards implementing paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). On 2 March 1962, Mr. Johnson was reappointed by the Commission. Mr. Johnson spent four weeks, from 14 April until 12 May, in the Middle East, holding conversations with the Prime Ministers of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, the President of the United Arab Republic, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the five countries, and other pertinent authorities. He has continued the consultative process in New York.

13. The Commission commends Mr. Johnson for the dedication, persistence and imagination which he has devoted to this difficult task.

14. The Commission has long realized that a solution to the Palestine refugee problem would require time and continued effort, and it intends to carry forward its initiative on this question.

*Co-operation with the United Nations Relief and Works Administration
for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations
Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)*

15. Most cordial and useful relations with both UNRWA and UNTSO have facilitated the Commission's work during the past

year. During his mission to the Middle East Mr. Johnson consulted officials of those organizations and received most efficient administrative assistance. In connexion with its technical work, particularly the blocked accounts release operation, the Commission also received necessary and useful co-operation from both organizations.

Notes

1/ *See Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixteenth Session, Annexes*, agenda item 25, document A/4921, para. 13.
